

**DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS**

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For Immediate Release  
March 7, 2006

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**AGENCIES JOIN TOGETHER TO PROMOTE  
PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS WEEK**  
*Gambling Help Line and Brochures Aid Youth and Seniors*

SACRAMENTO – Recognizing the destructive consequences problem gambling has on families, communities and employers, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has issued a proclamation designating March 6-12, 2006, as National Gambling Awareness Week in California.

According to the California Council on Problem Gambling, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping problem gamblers, 3,868 Californians called the organization's gambling help line in 2005, a 13 percent increase from 2004. Callers were nearly evenly split between male (51.5 percent) and female (48.5 percent), and the majority of callers were between 26 to 55 years of age. Individuals most frequently reported stress, depression, anxiety, credit problems and alienation from family as negative effects of gambling.

In California, youth and seniors make up nearly 30 percent of those who call the problem gambling help line. In 2005, 15.6 percent of calls received were made by individuals over age 56. Additionally, in 2005, individuals 25 years of age and younger made up 16.6 percent of callers, a 6.2 percent increase from 2004.

"Parents, in particular, must understand that problem gambling can be as devastating as substance abuse," said Steve Hedrick, deputy director of the Department of Alcohol and Drug Program's Office of Problem Gambling (OPG). "There are often unintended negative consequences associated with problem gambling, and we recognize that problem gambling touches a broad range of people."

Several state agencies, including the California Horse Racing Board, California Gambling Control Commission, Department of Justice's Division of Gambling Control, Department of Mental Health, California State Lottery and California Council on Problem Gambling, have joined the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Program's Office of Problem Gambling (OPG) to increase public awareness about problem gambling behaviors by offering information, assistance and referrals to services.

OPG is distributing two brochures targeting California's youth and senior populations -- "Youth Gambling" and "Are You Gambling Away Your Retirement?". The brochures address different forms of gambling and provide readers with in-depth information on the signs and symptoms of problem gambling. More than 900,000 brochures have been sent to California public schools, local drug and alcohol agencies, mental health centers, probation departments, law enforcement agencies and about 18,500 lottery retailers in English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese. Gambling is legal in 47 states, and California is one of 16 states to offer problem gambling services. Problem gambling is defined as a pattern of gambling behavior that disrupts or compromises family or personal pursuits. Pathological gambling is defined as a loss of control over gambling and preoccupation with gambling.

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This obsessive treatable behavior affects about 2 to 3 percent of the population. Warning signs of problem gambling include gambling to escape boredom and loneliness, fantasizing about “getting rich quick” by gambling, gambling to impress friends and others, friends and family members expressing concern about one’s gambling, spending a majority of money on gambling, excessive borrowing from family and friends or using retirement funds or cashing in an insurance policy to finance gambling, lying to family and friends about money spent on gambling, unsuccessful efforts to cut back gaming activities, neglecting personal needs or health and mood swings based upon winning and losing.

Older adults typically gamble because of boredom or loneliness, for excitement, to avoid thinking about problems and because of unrealistic hopes of large winnings. Forms of youth gambling include the Internet (e.g., online gaming, casinos and sporting events), poker, private bets, betting on games of skill (e.g., golf, basketball, bowling and pool), casino games, raffles, cards/dice and Mah Jong.

OPG was established in August 2003 with the priority of developing gambling prevention programs. Since its inception, OPG has promoted problem gambling public awareness campaigns and supported help lines, research and training. Those seeking more information about problem gambling may log on to [http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov/opg\\_downloads.shtml](http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov/opg_downloads.shtml) to view and/or download youth and senior brochures or phone 1-800-GAMBLER. Individuals may also log on to [http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov/OPGhelp\\_survey.shtml](http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov/OPGhelp_survey.shtml) to take a free interactive quiz to determine if they might have a gambling problem.

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